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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the evolution of parenthood education programs in Poland. The history of attitudes toward childhood is traced briefly and the roles and responsibilities of parents in the modern family are discussed. Government support of the family in Poland is documented and some parent education or education for family life programs are described. (JMB)

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THE GOOD OF THE CHILD - COMMON GOAL OF PARENTS AND TEACHERS

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THE GOOD OF THE CHILD - COMMON GOAL OF PARENTS AND TEACHERS

Family is a product of the long-lasting evolution of mankind, nevertheless it was only in the twentieth century, or rather in its second half, that attention was drawn to the family's basic importance in child's development and education. Never before has the role of the family been so much stressed as it is today - the role of parents, that is, in the development, education and, broadly speaking, in the process of bringing a child within a framework of the society.

The interest that science and practice have been paying to the educational role of the family were preceded by the perception of a child - within the family and the society - as an autonomous entity. In Europe of old, when many children were born not to live up to the age of adolescence, children were treated in their families as products of nature rather than anything else; there was no place then for any emotional attitude towards a child.

To have a child meant, in those times, to fulfil several social functions at one time. In periods preceding industrialization, when a family was a workshop at the same time,

having children was equivalent to having a certain capital at hand - in the form of manpower, the parents' old age security or their security in case of illness; moreover it meant one could transfer one's material legacy, one's name, way of living, traditions and it also gave some social prestige to the mother. At present, alongside with the development of the society and the changes that have taken place within the family, these functions have vanished or, at least, have been subdued to far-reaching changes. Parents have their work outside home and they get paid for it, social security has developed as have welfare institutions; the laws of inheritance have been limited and womens' social status has changed thanks to the education, professional work and woman's broader participation in cultural, social and political life (J.Kellerhals, 1976).

Emotional relations have been brought to the fore of a present day family - both the relations between man and woman and the relations between parents and children. Today, a child fulfils its parents' emotional needs because it is desired for its' own sake. This has, to a certain extent, affected, the birth rate - which has decreased but, at the same time, the care that parents take of their children's health has increased, which, alongside with the development of medicine, has dramatically reduced children's death rate.

These changes are closely connected with a new perception of a child within a society - it has, at last, ceased to be per-

ceived as a miniature adult but it has been noticed as a developing man (m a n) with his own joys and sorrows, mental structures, emotions, etc. Phases of its development have been perceived and have started to be examined; universal and best possible development of a child has become a value, the recognition of which is being aimed at by the societies of the twentieth century, a century known as "the century of the child". This recognition is being achieved through both - the institutions dealing with education and health care and thanks to parents' care. And, although in our country a family is just an element in the whole system of education, yet it is a very important element because it is a constant one and the one that is active for many years. A child moves to new milieux of equals, its educators and educating institutions change but its family does not change - unless it is broken by divorce. Other elements of the education system provide important assistance for the family and they complete, in a way, its educational function.

Preparing a child to living outside family is one of the most important functions that parents have to fulfil. The quality of family relations deeply affects children's psychic development. A family that is able to perform its parental duties consistently and successfully gives a sense of security and union to each of its members; gives meaning to their aspirations, lines of action and provides them with a feeling of their own importance. For a child it is extremely important because it constitutes a link between itself and the exter-

nal world being a "buffer", "a filter" and a "pier". It fulfils an irreplacable function which lies at the root of an individual's growth into the society and of the personality's harmonious development. The capacity of integration, co-operation and creation have all their roots in family life (M.Kellmer Prigle, 1974).

Fulfilment in childhood of development needs, which change according to age, guarantees a child's best possible development of its all possibilities. Comparative studies on methods of children's upbringing have proved that the quality, type and quantity of contacts between parents and child as well as of contacts between a child and other children affect that child's development in various ways. Certain types of parental attitudes make it impossible for children to fully fulfil their basic socio-psychical needs, while other attitudes secure full gratification.

Interactions between mother and child in fulfilling basic psychic and physical needs make the point of departure in the creation of emotional relations between parents and children. Research has proved that double-track processes have been most successful: when it is not only the child that imitates mother but also mother imitating the child. (R. Bell, 1968; U. Bronfenbranner, 1970). Thus the proportion is that of one to one and its stability and reciprocality mainly favour learning and development progress.

Nowadays, father begins to play the role of a meaningful personality in those early interactions. More and more frequent is the participation of young fathers in the care of children, at least in the child's first year of life. In Poland that care takes other forms than just playing with a child or taking it for walks - it also means caring for the child in the sense of bathing it, bottle-feeding of plain feeding, etc. Those fathers find pleasure in dealing with a child. They usually share those occupations with their wives. This means both - a manifestation of proper partnership in marriage and a sign of appreciation of parental role.

Introducing a child into a society within the framework of the family is basically a double-track process: the child is being shaped under the influence of its parents while the parents, thanks to the devotion and interest with which they bring it up, learn to perceive the world from the child's perspective enriching and developing their own personalities.

In our country a deep committment of young people in family affairs is observed. Research has proved that the foundation of the family constitutes, alongside with professional work, one of chief values (K. Kiciński, J. Kurczewski, 1974). Also, the good of the child is placed at the top of the hierarchy of values recognized by adult members of the society, irrespective of their age and sex (T. Kocowski, 1975).

However, to be a parent in the present, fast-changing world is not an easy function. The family itself, its structure

and functions are all subject to changes, as is the society within which it is organized. Parents are to prepare children for life in an unknown future while their opportunities to make use of the past experiences are fewer and fewer. More and more often they have to rely on themselves and self-acquired knowledge.

In our country it is the state that helps parents solve the numerous problems and overcome difficulties by means of the welfare policies - health service and educational assistance, etc. Let me just mention some of the forms of this assistance. Working mothers may take advantage of paid 16- or 18-week maternity leaves. Apart from that they have the right to obtain a three-year unpaid leave while upbringing a child of three to four, with the return to former work secured. This period is calculated within working years, which is important when the question of retirement arises. Work is carried on at present on a proposal concerning allowances for mothers taking care of children during unpaid maternity leaves. Also, worse-off mothers get a confinement allowance. Mothers or fathers get family allowances for children. There are also special allowances for the parents of disabled and mentally ill children. There is a special alimony fund for those divorced women whose former husbands are unable to pay alimony. There is free health service for pregnant women and for children. Periodical medical check-ups are being introduced for all children and children's health cards are made. There is a network of creches, the development of which is

meant to help those mothers who do not wish to take advantage of unpaid maternity leaves and want professional care to be taken of their children. Pre-school education is provided for children in the age of 3 to 7. In connection with the present reform of the Polish educational system the network of kindergartens is rapidly developing. This year the opportunity to go to kindergartens will be provided to all children who will have gone to school within a year and this opportunity will be gradually spread to younger generations.

One of the newest initiatives is the introduction, as of 1978, of a new subject into the curricula of the ten-year obligatory school, dealing with the "preparation to family life". Within the last few years this subject has been introduced, as an experiment, in over a thousand secondary general and vocational schools, meant to shape opinions, beliefs and attitudes towards man and family. Teachers have special competence both to choose from the variety of subjects that they introduce during a lesson and to choose the method of introducing the given subject to their pupils. Pupils' progress is not marked in any conventional way. At present this subject can be taught by teachers specialising in any subject, provided they are capable of creating, modifying, continuous improvement of their working methods and of establishing proper contact with both - the youngsters and their parents. There are courses for those teachers, meant to help them improve their qualifications, Great impor-

tance is attached to this subject, not only because of the youth that is being prepared for family life, but also because of the opportunity to intensify the development of pedagogical culture of parents of school youth and pre-school children. It is worth mentioning that, at the academic level, two more subjects have been introduced at the Warsaw University. They are known as: "Science of Family" and "Pathology of Family and Family Guidance".

At present, much importance is attached to the improvement of the society's pedagogical culture. Instances of parents' schools are more and more frequent (J. Wołczyk, 1976). The improvement of the society's pedagogical culture, apreading knowledge of the modern family in the seventies is carried on along many ways. Scientific publishing firms, popular publishing firms, popular publishing businesses and mass media are all taking part in the process. A new monthly "Magazyn rodzinny" ("Family Magazine") has been founded, for instance, and there is a special supplement to the Polish United Workers'Party daily "Trybuna Ludu" ("People's Tribune"), issued Saturday/Sunday dealing with family and educational problems. Radio and television have been paying more and more attention to those subjects. The Society for the Propagation of Knowledge has started a series of lectures within the so-called Parents' University, organized yearly. Various forms of cooperation with family units have been tried out by the Society of Children's Friends, among them

talks on education on factory radio selection centers. It is difficult to list all initiatives meant to solve family problems, assist the family in its functions.

On the whole, all these initiatives take the form of mass action influencing an unknown audience. In a wider perspective it is necessary to develop the cooperation with families in small groups and to develop individual family guidance. For this sort of action kindergartens, educational guidance centers and Mother and Child Centers, Maintained by the National Health Service, are particularly useful. Supported by professional assistance in the science of family these units could improve their contacts with parents. There is a growing need in the society for guidance in problems arising in the family and in children's upbringing. Although, last year, the network of pre-marital guidance centers developed considerably, within the National Health Service, these units are not prepared to deal with problems arising in the parents - children relations. Meanwhile, marital roles are closely connected with parental ones within a family and it would not be advantageous to separate them artificially: after all, marital problems are easily projected onto issues of children's upbringing and, vice versa, problems concerning children's upbringing are by no means irrelevant as far as marital conflicts are concerned.

Influencing parental attitudes is a different problem calling for solution. It is generally understood that parents' emo-

tional attitudes towards children affect satisfaction - or blockade - of their psychical needs, thus influencing the stimulation of regular development or the incidence of behavioural disorders in children. Shaping proper attitudes of parents toward children is thus understood to have a special, prophylactical value. Apart from that, the displayed parental attitudes function as a filter in the perception of a given informational material. Because they function in a selective manner, only the material complying with the possessed attitude is remembered while the attitudes at war with the acquired experience are neither perceived nor adapted; there are also distortions in perception and acquisition of material, alongside the line of acquired attitudes. Thus, particularly in attitudes that are educationally undesirable, the quota of information are transferred to parents unobjectively, through their deforming attitudes. This has tremendous practical consequences and it is necessary to realize the importance of shaping educationally desirable attitudes and transforming those that are undesirable in this sense. Research has proved that a relatively high percentage of parents manifest attitudes that can be defined as moderately improper (M. Ziemska, 1977). These attitudes are close to undecided ones. But they are fairly easily transformed to attitudes desirable from the developmental and educational point of view. On the other hand, if neglected and left without any correction, these attitudes can easily approach the ones undesirable from the point of view of practice. Parental atti-

tudes are relatively easy to correct - as long as they are unstable and plausible - when the child is still very young and when parents are young. Hence the problem of shaping parental attitudes arises to be vital in the nearest future.

Attitudes of educators in kindergartens and of nurses in creches are another problem worth mentioning. Teachers possessing proper attitudes can even compensate parents' improper attitudes, thus acting in a prophylactic manner. Naturally, they stimulate children's development with their own emotional attitude to the largest possible extent, because they can manifest recognition, cooperation and understanding for the child's rights and can grant it freedom of activity. This is an important problem, probably lacking proper stress so far.

I do believe that the issues I have tackled will have been completed and analysed in a detailed way by the papers and discussions undertaken within our problem section, to the benefit of the implementation of our common slogan: "The Good of the Child - A Common Goal of Parents and Teachers".

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